

OPEN ACCESS

INTRODUCTION

All historians should want their work to be as accessible as possible – and so they ought to support ‘open access’ (i.e. free access to their work posted on the web), wherever possible. But there are limits to what is possible without sacrificing academic freedom and quality. For example, publication doesn’t come free – there are costs involved in editing your work and mounting it on the web. Furthermore, as an author you have certain moral rights to have work properly used, reproduced and attributed, which not all forms of ‘open access’ respect. What follows is a very rough guide to a complicated and ever-changing landscape.

Manuscripts

You have the right to do whatever you want with your own manuscripts (drafts of papers, conference presentations, etc.), so long as you’re not using content that belongs to other people (e.g. images, music, major portions of copyright works). Why not post them on your own website or a site such as academia.edu? But you will need to consider what rights over your own content you wish to give to others. You’ll need to indicate the terms on which you are posting. If you say ‘all rights reserved’, then you are of course permitting others to read your work, but not to use it in any other way. If you are happy for others to use your work – for example, to copy and distribute it – Creative Commons has designed a range of licences that you can use to indicate exactly what uses you are happy to permit (see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>). The most popular of these licences among humanities scholars tends to be CC BY-NC ND. This allows others to copy your work in full and distribute it intact, but not to alter it or to combine it with their other work in ways that make it difficult to distinguish yours from theirs, and not to make use of it commercially. Just add the relevant CC logo to your paper when you upload it to show under what terms you are making it available.

Dissertations

This is a particularly vexing subject. Most universities are now developing institutional policies for dissertations produced by their own students, but these vary widely. All universities require you to deposit your dissertation in their libraries (or, increasingly, their online repositories), but many offer ‘embargoes’ that prevent others from accessing your work without your permission for a period of 2-6 years or longer. This is because, in our discipline, dissertations do not (as they often do in the sciences) bring together work that has been published elsewhere in article form, and they are often seen only as rough drafts for a book that will eventually be published. It’s not clear whether the availability of your dissertation will interfere with your ability to publish a book based on it. So the embargo gives you some control over the dissemination of your work until it is published. The American Historical Association encourages universities to permit embargoes of up to 6 years (see <http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/american-historical-association-statement-on-policies-regarding-the-embargoing-of-completed-history-phd-dissertations/>). You should find out for yourself what is your own institution’s policy.

Journal articles

This is the area where open access has extended furthest (reflecting the centrality of the journal article in the sciences, where the open access movement began, and upon which many policies are based). Funding bodies are now often mandating open access – that is, if they pay for your research, and you publish it in the form of a

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journal article, you must make it open access according to certain prescribed conditions. So your approach to your own journal articles will depend on who (if anyone) has paid for you to do your research. The RHS has prepared [information sheets](#) explaining the open-access conditions for those funded by the research councils (e.g. AHRC, ESRC) – which are particularly stringent – and those employed on teaching and research contracts by universities who are eligible for submission to the REF. A good general rule of thumb – you don't need to pay an 'Article Processing Charge' (APC) or any other publication fee in order to ensure 'open access' for your article. Any publisher that insists on payment without offering free open-access options merits the closest scrutiny.

Books

There are at present no mandates from any UK funders of historical research (except for the Wellcome Trust who fund research in the history of medicine) requiring open access for work published in book form, including chapters in collections of essays. (Some mandates refer to 'conference proceedings', but this refers to journal-like forms of publication common in the sciences and does not cover collections of essays published as books, even if they derive from conferences.) In other words, you are unlikely to be required to put your work published in book form on open access anytime soon – and certainly not for the next REF (c. 2020). Because publication of books is a good deal more expensive than publication of articles, there are formidable barriers to providing open access for books in ways that do not discriminate against un- or under-funded historians (i.e. most of us!). Nevertheless, there are some interesting experiments in open-access publishing for monographs and if you have an opportunity to take part in such experiments, without paying a publication fee, we encourage you to do so. We're happy to provide informal advice on this subject to people who email us about specific schemes.